

Accepted – February 10, 2009

**AFRICAN BURYING GROUND COMMITTEE**

**OCTOBER 29, 2008**

**PORTSMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY**

**4:00 P.M.**

Present: Vernis Jackson, Chair; Mary Bailey, Vice Chair; Councilor Christine Dwyer; Jack McGee; Suzanne M. Woodland (Ex-Officio), Steve Parkinson (Ex-officio)

Absent: Valerie Cunningham; Councilor Laura Pantelakos

Also Present: Cindy Hayden, Deputy City Manager; David Moore, Assistant Community Development Director; Robbi Woodburn of Woodburn & Company

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Chairperson Jackson opened the meeting and recognized Mr. Moore who summarized the results of the meeting held with project abutters on October 8, 2008. Mr. Moore advised the Committee that several abutters attended and that he had contacted all abutters by phone prior to the meeting. Abutters who attended the meeting were supportive of the design plan. Subsequent to that meeting staff met with an abutter, Eric Weinreib, who had been unable to attend the general meeting and the showed the plans to him and he was also supportive. Mr. Moore reported that the abutters raised functional questions such as how would snow would be removed, impacts on trash and recycling pick up, street name changing, vandalism, and lighting questions [See minutes of October 8, 2008 Committee meeting]. There were no significant objections to the project as proposed.

Mr. Moore also summarized the results of the work session with the City Council on October 20. In particular he reviewed the request made by Councilor Dwyer to reallocate and reprogram \$993,850.00 in federal funds from Riverwalk Project to the African Burying Ground. Staff has made inquiries of HUD and expects to report back to the City Council at its November 10<sup>th</sup> meeting. Councilor Dwyer's recommendation to explore the reallocation of the Riverwalk funds received the consensus support of the Council. The Council also gave its consensus support to move forward to finalize the design for the African Burying Ground. Cindy Hayden emphasized that the federal funds must be expended by April of 2010.

The Committee then discussed fundraising. The African Burying Ground Committee reached a consensus to recommend to the City Council that a trust be established to fund the construction and maintenance of the African Burying Ground as well as to support related educational and cultural activities which would educate the public regarding the significance of the African Burying Ground. Several Committee members specifically suggested that the fundraising should provide an opportunity to allow as many members of the public as possible to participate in the fundraising so that public can have ownership in the African Burying Ground project.

Cindy Hayden recommended that until we have a better cost estimate after the completion of final design she expects that construction will be in excess of \$1 million dollars.

Jack McGee asked whether there was a matching requirement for the HUD funding should the HUD funding be available for the African Burying Ground project. Cindy Hayden advised that there is no matching funds requirement.

There was a question regarding the use of UDAG funds. Cindy Hayden advised that the present thought was that UDAG funds would not be used for the African Burying Ground project but instead used for the public- private partnerships for Ceres and Bow Street area.

David Moore indicated that Valerie Cunningham would be supportive of a trust and that she would like to see the trust be able to including not only maintenance but also some educational or cultural outreach component. There was additional discussion regarding the name of the African Burying Ground on Chestnut Street. The artist has been using "Portsmouth African Burying Ground". There was some concern among the Committee members that in light of the number of cities that are named "Portsmouth" that it might be better to use the name "The African Burying Ground in Portsmouth, NH".

The next topic of discussion of the African Burying Ground Committee was the upcoming public forum on November 17<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. Mr. Moore provided a summary of the preparation for that meeting. He will be providing notice to those who participated in the prior public forums for the African Burying Ground. He advised that Channel 22 will replay the May 5, 2007 public forum. Channel 22 will also replay the October 20<sup>th</sup> work session with the City Council. The design presentation on November 17<sup>th</sup> will illustrate how the public's input from these design forums were incorporated into the present design. The public's ideas for project fundraising will also be sought for this important project.

There was then additional discussion on raising funds for this project including seeking grants and foundation monies. Cindy Hayden indicated that there may not be many public grants available. The idea of creating a sub committee to discuss fundraising was widely supported by the Committee. The Committee also anticipates soliciting contributions from the public.

Before proceeding to additional business, Ms. Bailey moved to accept the minutes from the September 17, 2008 and October 8, 2008 meetings. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dwyer, and all concurred.

Mr. Moore reviewed the results of the recent meeting with representatives from the Division of Historic Resources (DHR). At that meeting, Dr. Richard Boisvert and Edna. Feighner indicated that the Division's primary concern was that there be no further disturbance of any of the remaining graves at the site. This led to a general concern about

the effects of tree roots on the burying ground as well as to the commitment on the part of the City to do some additional test trenches in Chestnut Street to confirm the design teams' assumption about the available depth below grade to install foundational and drainage components of the design. Throughout the design process it has been assumed by the design team and City staff that there is 2' 5" of space below Chestnut Street which can be disturbed without threatening the disturbance of additional grave shafts. As a result of the discussion with DHR, the City indicated that it would perform additional exploration to confirm the availability of this space below Chestnut Street. City staff advised the Committee that the work on this part of the project would begin in a few weeks. An Archeological consultant will be on-site during that exploration.

Mr. McGee had questions with regard to the role of DHR on the project and staff provided answers. The City was working with the design team to address the tree root issue raised by DHR. Mr. Moore and Ms. Woodland advised the Committee that the City will continue to work with DHR and report back.

In preparation for the November 17<sup>th</sup> meeting with the public, Councilor Dwyer suggested a summary of "Frequently Asked Questions" be provided which might address issues such as snow removal, trash removal, vandalism and street naming. In light of the fundraising discussion, it was also determined that some fundraising appeal materials should also be created for people who may want to donate immediately after the Burying Ground design presentation.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.